

EVALUATION OF THE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF THE BULGARIAN SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC PARTY DURING THE OTTOMAN PERIOD IN THE LIGHT OF NEW ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

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Abstract

In the light of new archival documents, this article aims to evaluate the political activities of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party, the public meetings it organized, the declarations it prepared, the committee activities it carried out, and the intellectual goals it wanted to achieve in the early 20th century. The party was established in a highly cosmo-political environment. The Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party, which emerged at the end of the 19th century on the basis of social-democratic ideas, took part in many important political and social actions in Bulgaria and Western Thrace during this turbulent period. The party attempted to organize Bulgarian workers, to encourage them to migrate into America, to hold public meetings against the Bulgarian Government, to carry out propaganda actions, to perform propaganda activities, to prepare provocative declarations, to experience hot conflicts with the government, and to spread social-democratic ideas by gaining supporters. In the light of this review and Ottoman archival documents, this study tries to analyze the actions of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party.

Key Words: *Bulgaria, Social-Democratic Party, Underground Revoluitional Activities, Migration, Brigandage, Public Meeting.*

Öz

Yeni Arşiv Belgeleri Işığında Bulgar Sosyal-Demokrat Partisi'nin Osmanlı Dönemindeki Siyasi Faaliyetlerinin Değerlendirilmesi

Bu makale çalışması, yeni arşiv belgeleri ışığında Bulgar Sosyal-Demokrat Partisi'nin, 20. yüzyılın başlarında gerçekleştirmiş olduğu siyasi faaliyetleri, düzenlemiş olduğu mitingleri, hazırlamış olduğu beyannameleri, örgütlemiş olduğu komitacılık faaliyetlerini ve düşünsel anlamda gerçekleştirmek istediği hedefleri değerlendirme amacını taşımaktadır. Parti, oldukça kozmopolitik bir iklimde doğmuştur. 19. yüzyılın sonlarında sosyal demokrat fikirleri temel

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alarak ortaya çıkan Bulgar Sosyal-Demokrat Fırkası, bu çalkantılı süreçte Bulgaristan ve Batı Trakya'da birçok önemli siyasi ve sosyal eylemin içerisinde bulunmuştur. Parti, Bulgar işçilerin örgütlenmesi, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ne göçe teşvik edilmesi, Bulgar hükümeti aleyhine mitingler düzenlenmesi, propaganda faaliyetlerinin gerçekleştirilmesi, işçileri kışkırtıcı beyannamelerin hazırlanması, hükümetle sıcak çatışmalara girilmesi ve sosyal demokrat fikirlere taraftar kazanarak bu fikirlerin yayılması için büyük çabalar sarf etmiştir. Bu incelemeyle Osmanlı arşiv belgeleri ışığında; Bulgar Sosyal-Demokrat Partisi'nin gerçekleştirmiş olduğu bu faaliyetler analiz edilmeye çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Bulgaristan, Sosyal-Demokrat Fırkası, Komitacılık Faaliyetleri, Göç, Eşkıyalık, Miting.*

Introduction

Social Democracy is a concept that was primarily used in worker unions in Europe towards the middle of the 19th century. The Revolution of 1848 had a profound effect on all of Europe and Berlin. A concept called “*Social Democracy*” was made up by intellectuals and leaders to defend the law of the oppressed working classes. Subsequently, social democracy became noticeably widespread in Western economies after the completion of some stages in the historical development process. The Western world first experienced mercantilism and then transformed into liberalism. Social democracy, on the other hand, developed primarily within liberalism, and then became stronger as a reaction to this idea. The concept has begun to gain its current meaning since the second half of the 20th century.¹ It has been observed in the period from the mid-19th century until today that social democracy was defined and interpreted as widely as possible by both thinkers who defended this idea and intellectuals who remained outside of this idea.²

It is clear that the concept and content of social democracy did not develop in the Ottoman period as in Western countries;³ because the Ottoman State had not experienced the industrial transformation experienced by Western countries and besides it had not witnessed serious labor movements and trade unionism activities. However, even before 1908, societies were formed that relied on the weak working class in the empire and produce policies through them. The Ottoman State was always suspicious of the existence of these emerging groups. Socialism was accepted as an undesirable ideology by the statesmen. The 2nd International⁴ adopted in its decision in 1896, as a principle, that all nations have the right to determine their own future. The Ottoman State consisting of many ethnic and religious groups had the idea that this decision taken by the 2nd International would have very dangerous consequences. For this reason, social democratic ideas and formations were generally not welcomed within the state. Despite this, the noticeable increase in the economic-oriented labor movements within the state, especially after the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy, directly contributed to the development of the idea of social democracy and

¹ Sarıtaş 2006, p. 5-6.

² Emrealp 1991, p. 14.

³ Yılmaz 2005, p. 158.

⁴ International Federation of Workers.

Evaluation of the Political Activities of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party During the Ottoman Period in the Light of New Archival Documents

led to the emergence of various political organizations to defend this idea. After the workers' movements started to develop in the country, political formations such as the People's Party, Ottoman Socialist Party, Workers Union Association, and Ottoman Democrat Party tried to produce policies in favor of the working class following 1908. Apart from the center of the country, such organizations were also experienced in autonomous geographies like Bulgaria, which was connected to the state within the Balkan geography.⁵ As a matter of fact, many societies that defended the social democratic view were established in Western Thrace and Bulgaria. These societies which put forward various opinions and actions on the basis of social-democratic ideas, could not turn into a big political structure over time, but at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, they took part in political and sometimes military activities in the Balkans, especially in the Bulgarian geography.⁶

Within the framework of these issues, one of the political structures operating in Bulgaria's geography in line with social democratic ideas was the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party. This political formation, which was not known exactly when it was founded, was formed as an idea, took part in various activities, and became a party in the following process. The Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party carried out some political and communitarian activities in Western Thrace and Bulgaria from the beginning of the century until the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy.

However, to analyze the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party and its activities more properly, it would be appropriate to emphasize the concept of the "*Social Democratic Party*" within the framework of the Ottoman political life at this point. As a result of our investigations, there were at least three political parties established under the name of a social democrat in different periods and regions in the territory of the Ottoman Empire. When an evaluation is carried out on the basis of the new archival documents, it is extremely difficult to say that there is a direct relationship among these three political parties.

It is thought that the establishment of a political party called the "*Social Democratic Party*" took place for the first time at the center of the Ottoman Empire, in Istanbul during the Second Constitutional Monarchy. The rulers of the party were four Greeks, two Turks, two Armenians, two Bulgarians, and two Jews. The party had a Turkish and Greek publication called "*Irgat-Ergatis*". Although the "*Social Democratic Party*",⁷ established after the Armistice of Montrose, which was signed at the end of World War I on October 30, 1918, has the same name with this political structure, it was not clear whether there was a connection between these two political formations. Mete Tunçay and Bulgarian historian Stefan Velikov think that there is a connection between the "*Social Democratic Party*" established during the armistice period and the "*Social Democratic Party*" established during the Second Constitutional Monarchy. However, there is no concrete evidence to support this idea.⁸

⁵ Neuburger 2017, p. 878.

⁶ Sarıtaş 2006, p. 173-189.

⁷ For detailed and up-to-date research on this party, see Ünal 2020, p. 381-398.

⁸ Tunçay 1991, p. 128.

The political structure, which was formed under the name of “*Social Democratic Party*” during the Armistice Period, represents a political formation established within the cosmopolitan structure⁹ of this period in the Ottoman Empire,¹⁰ which was defeated at the end of the World War I.¹¹ As will be remembered, by the end of 1918, the Ottoman Empire, which was described as the “*Sick Man of Europe*”, was about to perish. Anger had accumulated in the country against the pressure of the leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress.¹² After the signing of the Armistice of Montrose dated October 30, 1918, the political influence of the Party of Union and Progress was completely broken, bringing a period of political relaxation throughout the country. The removal of tension and pressure in the political scene also paved the way for the establishment of many parties. In this process, political parties acting in line with very different political purposes and ideas were established.¹³ One of the political parties established within this structure and climate of the armistice period was the “*Social Democratic Party*”.¹⁴

Within the scope of this research subject, we encountered in a document at the Presidency State Archives the name of a Social-Democratic Party that is different from the ones known regarding migration activities that occurred within Bulgarian geography. Among the following statements in the document in question, another political party named “*Social Democratic Party*” is mentioned: “*It is the official letter sample from the Bulgarian Commissariat¹⁵ dated 10 November 1907.¹⁶ The number of people who want to immigrate to America in the principality and the state is increasing day by day and a group of Bulgarian workers are encouraged to migrate by some supporters of the Social-Democratic Party on the basis of a method...*”¹⁷ Based on all the information in this document, it is understood that a political structure named “*Social-Democratic Party*” in autonomous Bulgaria encourages Bulgarian workers to immigrate to America. In our opinion, this “*Social-Democrat Party*” that is mentioned in the document entering into the official records of the state has no connection with the “*Social Democratic Party*”, which was established during the Second Constitutional Monarchy or the armistice period. Although Bulgaria gained its independence on October 5, 1908,¹⁸ it was an autonomous principality that was still attached to the Ottoman State in 1907 when the document was prepared.¹⁹ However, the political formation mentioned here is a different political structure from the party that was

⁹ Yavuz 2017, p. 283.

¹⁰ Armaoğlu 2014, p. 275.

¹¹ For an up-to-date evaluation about the armistice period and the developments in the Ottoman Empire during this period, see Ünal 2019, p. 92-110.

¹² Lewis 2008, p. 323.

¹³ Regarding the concept of the Political Party see Uzun 2010, p. 7.

¹⁴ Kahraman 1993, p. 47.

¹⁵ Parlatri 2014, p. 918.

¹⁶ <http://www.ttk.gov.tr/genel/tarih-cevirme-kilavuzu/> (Accessed on 18.02.2020.)

¹⁷ BOA. A.MTZ.04/161.6; BOA. A.MTZ.HR.64.

¹⁸ Turan 2013, p. 29.

¹⁹ Bodur 2013, p. 87.

Evaluation of the Political Activities of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party During the Ottoman Period in the Light of New Archival Documents

founded under the name of the social democrat in the Bulgarian geography and that was formed in Istanbul with the same name.²⁰

Besides this information, it should be stated that in Bulgaria neither after the Second Constitutional Monarchy, nor during the armistice period, the political organizations established under the name of “*Social Democratic Party*” could turn into mainstream political structures.²¹ Although they tried to be active during the periods when they were founded, they were unable to appeal to the public throughout the country. Among these, the “*Social Democratic Party*”, which was established in Bulgaria came to the forefront through its propaganda plus committee activities and it carried out many actions in favor of Bulgarian workers.²²

Within the scope of this research subject, various evaluations have been performed in the light of new archival documents regarding the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party, which actively carried out various actions in Bulgaria and Western Thrace in the early 20th century. This study has come out to bring new information and interpretations to the activities carried out by the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party in the light of the Ottoman archives, rather than the purpose of analyzing the establishment, development, founders, chronological political activities, and effects of that political party. At this point, it should also be stated that the word “*Bulgarian*” in our study means the people who speak Bulgarian and various dialects of Bulgarian primarily in Bulgaria, Western Thrace, Macedonia, and other Balkan geographies.²³

In this framework, the documents obtained as a result of the research carried out in the Presidency State Archives were subjected to the examination. Archival documents were transcribed first, and then the information in the documents was evaluated. In addition, copyrights and studies related to the subject were used to perform a better analysis of the information in the documents. Documents have been analyzed under titles appropriate to their contents.

The Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party emerged during the years when the effects and results of the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War (The 93 War) were deeply felt.²⁴ This war, which was not prevented by the Ottoman basic law dated December 23, 1876, deeply affected not only Bulgaria but also all the Balkans.²⁵ For example, large immigration movements from Russia, Romania, Macedonia, Austria, and Thrace started owing to the pressures brought by 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War.²⁶ Bulgarians

²⁰ Bakacak 2016, p. 44.

²¹ Tunçay 1991, p. 128.

²² The anti-nationalism of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party and constant conflict with the local Bulgarian Government caused them to be isolated from Bulgarian politics. This also resulted in the party not being able to find many supporters. For detailed information, see Ertürk 2018, p. 324.

²³ Popek 2018, p. 46.

²⁴ Yetişgin 2007, p. 162.

²⁵ For a highly qualified assessment about the preparation, purpose, scope, and effects of the Ottoman basic law, see Berkes 2004, p. 309-336.

²⁶ Pundeff 1971, p. 525-526.

living in different countries of the Balkan Peninsula migrated with the idea that they would have better living conditions in the Bulgarian Principality established via the Treaty of Berlin.²⁷ These migrations had an extraordinary impact on the population structure of the Bulgarian Principality.²⁸ Because of these migrations, the political, social, and cultural structure of the newly established Bulgarian state was re-shaped. The ethnic structure of a significant part of Bulgarian cities changed radically. As a result of these incidents, thousands of Turks left their homes and properties and made a forced migration to Anatolia due to the pressure, violence, intimidation, and massacres that began to be applied to Turks living in the Balkan Peninsula, especially in Bulgaria.²⁹ Houses, farms, and land evacuated by the Turks were allocated to newly arrived immigrants to Bulgaria at extremely low prices.³⁰

For the Bulgarians, the Treaty of Berlin was a cornerstone. As a matter of fact, they established committees to expand their lands and further weaken the Ottoman Empire's authority in the region, which was gradually decreasing. They carried out many political and military activities, especially in Macedonia and Eastern Rumelia, through komitadji and gang activities. The established committees aimed to prove the incompetence of the Ottoman Empire in this geography through massacres, kidnapping consuls and committing arson official buildings. Through this method, they aimed to gain more land by enabling the European States to intervene in the region. The names and titles of these committees, which were often referred to as the "*Bulgarian Mischief Committee*" in Ottoman documents, served the same purpose, no matter how different they were.³¹

Bulgaria, which was formerly a part of the Danube Province, has made progress owing to the arrangements by Mithat Pasha when he was a governor.³² Even if there were no rulers, some of the Bulgarian people during this period were satisfied with the

²⁷ For a detailed review on the Treaty of Berlin see Uçarol 2015, p. 419-425.

²⁸ Bishku 2003, p. 78-79.

²⁹ The Treaty of Berlin, which was dated 13 July 1878, has an important role in leading the Ottoman Empire to the collapse. This period brought Bulgarians the independence but massacre, migration, and tears the Turks. The journey to the independence of the Bulgarians caused the Turks in Rumelia to leave their lands, where they lived for centuries, via Russian-supported persecution and massacres. During the independence process the Western states, especially the Russians, had great support for the Bulgarians. However, sometimes these contributions reached the level of intervention in the internal affairs of the Bulgarian Principality. For this reason, it has been observed that the Bulgarian people from time to time have been raising their voices against the intervention of Western countries in their countries. See Özcan 2014, p. 107.

³⁰ Popek 2018, p. 56-58.

³¹ The names of some of these committees can be listed as follows: Bulgarian-Macedonian Central Committee, Macedonian Committee, Patriotic Association, Central Adrianople-Macedonian Committee, Macedonian Student Organisation, Macedonian Political Society, Young Macedonian Association, and Macedonian Bulgarian Committee. For detailed information on this subject see Aydın 1989, p. 209-210.

³² Kaya 2021, p. 89.

Evaluation of the Political Activities of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party During the Ottoman Period in the Light of New Archival Documents

Ottoman administration.³³ Some groups, like other Balkan nations, dealt with nationalist movements under the influence of the previously established Bulgarian National Church. Having a headquarters outside, The Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee, founded by intellectuals and some merchants, many of whom had studied in Russia managed this movement. This committee even attempted to start a rebellion near Plovdiv on 2 May 1876, although it had very few members. The Bulgarian rebel movement, which killed many Turkish peasants and set these villages on fire, was quickly quelled by the local forces. In the clashes which took place, nearly two or three thousand rebels were killed. This incident was announced to the whole world by American missionaries and officials in a partial and exaggerated way that the Turks massacred the Bulgarians, and the news that the death toll was a hundred thousand was spread.³⁴

Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party and the Party's Encouragement of Bulgarian Workers to Immigrate to America

As part of our research, the first document on the activities carried out by the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party deals with the issue of encouraging Bulgarian workers to immigrate to America. As known, there was immigration to America to have better living conditions from many countries of Europe since the 19th century. While there were many factors related to these migrations, it was apparent that economic factors came to the forefront at this point. Before the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy on July 23, 1908, workers immigrated from Bulgaria, which was a principality under the Ottoman Empire, to America as in many European countries.

Within the scope of our investigation, this issue was discussed in the Ottoman archive numbered "2977/706" titled "*This is the Example of the Official Letter*³⁵ dated 10 November 1907 from the Bulgarian Commissioner". The document offers the following information about the migration movement in question and the relationship of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party with this migration movement: "*The number of people who want to immigrate to America within the principality and the state is increasing day by day, and a group migration of Bulgarian workers are encouraged by some supporters of the Social-Democratic Party on the basis of a planned method. As a result of these encouragement efforts, the number of people who want to migrate is increasing day by day. For this reason, the reasons for the immigration issue and the state affairs to which the issue is related should be investigated thoroughly. Bulgarians, who went to America with the idea of returning only by earning money and did not return to their country by settling there like European immigrants, should not break their ties with their roots, on the contrary, necessary measures should be investigated and be determined to strengthen their ties. For this purpose, your Grand Viziership has*

³³ Yetişgin 2007, p. 156.

³⁴ Karpat 2015, p. 66-67.

³⁵ The phrase "*copy of the official letter*" refers to the sample of the official writing or the copy of the official writing. See Devellioğlu 2001, p. 1021.

been informed that a special commission is being established in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and has been submitted for your approval with the decree by the Council of Ministers.”³⁶ In this document, an extremely important migration movement, fundamentally affecting the structure of the Bulgarian society at the beginning of the 20th century, is mentioned. According to this document dated 10 November 1907, the number of workers from the Bulgarian Principality³⁷ who wanted to immigrate to America was increasing. The movement of Bulgarians to America as a group was encouraged by the supporters of the Social-Democratic Party in a planned method. The reasons for this increasing immigration incident should be examined. Similarly, Bulgarians who immigrated to America with the idea of earning money and returning later to their countries, but instead settled there like other European immigrants should be investigated in detail to strengthen their ties with their homelands through determining necessary precautions. Besides this information, it was notified to the Grand Vizier in an official letter that a special commission was formed within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the Decree by the Council of Ministers to investigate the issue and was submitted for his approval.³⁸

When the document was evaluated in general, it is clear that it contains much important information. However, when we analyze the issue from the perspective of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party, which constitutes our subject of research, it is apparent that the Social-Democratic Party had a crucial role in the immigration movement. There was already an immigration movement from the Bulgarian Principality at the beginning of the century into America.³⁹ However, the encouragement of the migrant workers’ movement by the “*Social Democratic Party*” systematically increased the number of immigrations among workers day by day. This situation caused a serious reaction of the Bulgarian Commissariat. It seems that the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party encouraged the migration movement of Bulgarian workers, whose living standards and incomes are low, to increase their incomes and to have higher living conditions. However, the fact that most of the workers who went to and settled in America did not return and their ties with their countries were weakened were accepted as an important problem by the Bulgarian Commissariat and it was thought that the problem could be solved through a special board to be established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁴⁰

Bulgarian Principality, Declarations, Bloody Public Meetings, and Social-Democratic Party

As part of our study, the second document we examined regarding the political activities of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party is about the political activities in the Bulgarian Principality in the early 20th century, the majority of which are bloody.

³⁶ BOA. A.MTZ, 04/161.6; BOA. AMTZ.HR, 64.

³⁷ Karal 2011, p. 147.

³⁸ BOA. A.MTZ, 04/161.6; BOA. AMTZ.HR, 64.

³⁹ Cassens 1991, p. 15-16.

⁴⁰ BOA. A.MTZ, 04/161.6; BOA. AMTZ.HR, 64.

Evaluation of the Political Activities of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party During the Ottoman Period in the Light of New Archival Documents

Especially in the history of Bulgaria that gained an autonomous structure via the Berlin Treaty of 13 July 1878, the process after this treaty constitutes an important cornerstone in Bulgarian history.⁴¹

As a result of the Berlin Treaty, the Ottoman Empire under the pressure of great powers especially of Russia lost many Balkan lands and had to give autonomy to some of the remaining regions under its control.⁴² The Principality of Bulgaria, one of these regions, struggled to achieve its full independence during the period between 1878-1908.⁴³ However, this was an extremely painful process for Bulgaria. In these years, Bulgaria's ability to find its own identity in political, military, economic, and even cultural terms was only possible with overcoming many difficult processes. Especially from the Berlin Treaty to the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy, political conflicts were experienced, bloody public meetings were held, gang activities became a natural part of the daily life with the influence of many different political groups within the Bulgarian geography, and the local Bulgarian government did hesitate to use armed forces when necessary to show its authority. In short, Bulgaria declared its independence on October 5, 1908, after going through an extremely turbulent process.⁴⁴

Within the scope of our research topic, the archival document numbered "2828/662", dated "26 October 1907" and titled "To the Supreme Grand Vizier's Office" contains extremely important information regarding these issues. In the mentioned document, the following information was available about the political activities of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party and the shocking political developments in Bulgaria: "All members of the central branch of the Social Democratic Party, who issued declarations with biased and fiery words to participate in the public meeting planned to be held on the day of Sobranie against the current government delegation and the day before the dissolution of Sobranie's⁴⁵ opening, members of the party were arrested by the Sofia city police department. At any time, the government also detains and prohibits public meetings organized by a group of people against it,

⁴¹ Popek 2018, p. 45.

⁴² Stamatov and Raycheva 2001, p. 4.

⁴³ Karpat 2015, p. 70-71.

⁴⁴ Popek 2018, p. 46-47.

⁴⁵ This parliament is similar in shape to the Ottoman Parliament. The Bulgarian National Assembly consisted of two wings, the Supreme Sobranie and the Lower Sobranie. However, it was quite different from the Ottoman parliament in terms of its formation and operation. The Supreme Sobranie was the upper working body of the Bulgarian National Assembly. It was a council established to discuss extraordinary issues such as the declaration of war, peace, treaty, and the change of prince. This council used to convene in the old capital of Bulgaria, Tarnova, at the invitation of the prince or the deputy prince. The number of members was twice that of Lower Sobranie. However, the work of the Bulgarian National Assembly continued in Sofia, when it was chosen as the capital. The members of the Supreme Sobranie came to the parliament not by election but by the appointment. This assembly is a kind of assembly where bureaucrats constitute the prince's secretariat in some way. The term of office of the members of the Lower Sobranie was three years, each representing 10,000 people. They were elected by the people and represented the constituency from which they came. See Özcan 2014, p. 104.

whether these people aim to abuse it or not. The fact that the Bulgarian Government did not prohibit the public meetings of criminals who did not think of anything other than making bloody attacks by adopting extreme criminal intentions against the provinces of the neighboring Ottoman State, is good evidence that the government agreed with the ideas of the bandits in this regard and approved their actions. This is submitted for your information."⁴⁶ In the light of this document dated October 26, 1907, which was about the violent political conflicts in Bulgaria⁴⁷ and was sent to the Grand Vizier's Office; a day before the opening of Sobranie was annulled,⁴⁸ all members of the central branch of the "*Social Democratic Party*",⁴⁹ who published statements containing fiery words for the public meeting held on an opening day against the actions of the Bulgarian Government that was in power at that time and, who engaged in propaganda activities, as well as making an effort to gather supporters, were arrested by the security forces of the city of Sofia. The government also detained and prohibited public meetings towards those at any time who hold public meetings against it, whether they aim to abuse the government or not. On the other hand, the fact that the Bulgarian government did not prohibit the public meetings of murderers, who thought nothing but to carry out bloody gang activities against the surrounding provinces of the Ottoman Empire, was good evidence that the government agreed with the thoughts of the bandits and approved their actions. As can also be observed from this document, the developments in the geography of Bulgaria during this period were carefully observed by the authorities of the Ottoman State, and the information was presented to the Grand Vizier's Office.⁵⁰

When evaluated as a whole, the document discloses many significant developments and practices in Bulgaria during the period paving way for the Second Constitutional Monarchy.⁵¹ As discussed, at the beginning of the century, Bulgaria went through an extremely complicated political and social process. Banditry and komitadji activities, which were based on some of the gains the Bulgarians had obtained through the Treaty of Berlin, became a part of everyday life in Bulgaria during this period. To

⁴⁶ BOA. HR.SFR, 04/425.47.1; BOA. HR.SFR, 04/425.47.2

⁴⁷ In Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Eastern Rumelia, very violent incidents were experienced in these years. While the Bulgarian Government contributed to the further growth of these incidents, they did not want to confront the Ottoman State directly. Indeed, by mentioning its loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, the government stated that it supported the establishment of public security in Macedonia and that it would focus on this issue meticulously. However, there is no truth in this statement; because it was later found out that Bulgarian soldiers were among the organizers of the raid of Yanıklı village that took place in 1895. Therefore, Bulgaria tried not to draw attention by acting as a principality connected to the Ottoman Empire in the image. On the other hand, it was the most important reason for the incidents in the region. See Aydın 1989, p. 221.

⁴⁸ Bulgarian National Assembly.

⁴⁹ Apart from Bulgaria, the formation of the working class in regions such as Macedonia led to the establishment of trade unions, the organization of professional organizations, and the establishment of "*Social Democratic*" parties. See Ertürk 2018, p. 453.

⁵⁰ BOA. HR.SFR, 04/425.47.1; BOA. HR.SFR, 04/425.47.2

⁵¹ Karpat 2015, p. 85.

Evaluation of the Political Activities of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party During the Ottoman Period in the Light of New Archival Documents

prevent the turmoil in the principality, the local government applied extremely harsh methods. Organizing public meetings that provoked the public, trying to mobilize the masses with provocative declarations, and engaging in gang activities became ordinary events. However, the local Bulgarian government, which took drastic measures against its actions, supported the bandits when they wanted to implement similar moves in neighboring Ottoman provinces. This contradictory policy⁵² also revealed the true intention⁵³ of the Bulgarian Principality regarding the Ottoman State.⁵⁴

When we make an assessment focusing on the activities of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party, we must first express that the party was literally at the center of the incidents that took place in Bulgaria during this period. For example, the party is one of the main actors of the public meetings against the local government. The party, as one of the most active political parties of the period, carried out political propaganda activities against the government in the Bulgarian Principality. Provocative statements were prepared within the party and there were sometimes clashes with the government forces. The response of the local government to these activities of the party was extremely harsh. As a matter of fact, all members of the central branch of the “*Social Democratic Party*” were arrested due to their activities. The party was closely followed. In short, the party came to the forefront as one of the active political formations that played a role in shaping politics and social life in Bulgaria, which went through a complex process. The local government pursued a systematic policy of investigation and besides repressive policy to prevent the actions of the party from becoming more dangerous on its part.⁵⁵

Splitting of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party into Two Parts

The third document we have examined within the scope of our article towards the political activities of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party is about the party’s split into two parts. Having an autonomous structure as a result of the Treaty of Berlin on 13

⁵² Similar attitudes to this policy implemented by the Bulgarian Government were also exhibited by the Bulgarian ideologists. During this period, some Bulgarian socialists, who were organized under the leadership of Vasil Glavinov in centers such as Thessaloniki, Manastır, Skopje, Köprülü, and Xanti, opposed the cooperation with the Party of Union and Progress, which was on the agenda at that time. Bulgarian socialists saw the Union and Progress as the “*Bourgeois Class*” and feared that cooperating with them would harm their goals. See Ertürk 2018, p. 405.

⁵³ BOA. HR.SFR, 04/425.47.1; BOA. HR.SFR, 04/425.47.2

⁵⁴ It is a fact that the authority of the Ottoman Empire in the region weakened when compared to the past centuries. However, the state, which had the knowledge and organizational structure of the centuries, closely followed the activities of the Bulgarian Government and the komitadjis led by this government. It was tried to break the influence and dominance of the commander by taking appropriate and timely measures against their moves. As a matter of fact, meticulous steps were taken by the state to conduct secret investigations to receive quick information about the activities of the komitadjis, to be careful about the attempts of harmful societies, and to not allow any incidents to occur. See Aydın 1989, p. 224-225.

⁵⁵ BOA. HR.SFR, 04/425.47.1; BOA. HR.SFR, 04/425.47.2.

July 1878, Bulgaria⁵⁶ declared its independence on 5 October 1908, shortly after the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy on 23 July 1908.⁵⁷ Bulgarians, who remained under the domination of the Ottoman State for centuries, took advantage of the fluctuation that emerged with the Second Constitutional Monarchy and passed from autonomy to full independence. For this reason, we should specify at this point that the developments in the third document (dated 1919) which we examine in the study took place during the period of the independent Bulgarian state. During this period of the National Struggle Movement or War of Independence in Turkey, Bulgaria was also about to sign the Neuilly Treaty as a country that was defeated in the World War I.

Besides, it is asserted in the study that it will be useful to analyze the third document, which contains information about the line followed by the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party after the Second Constitutional Monarchy and the fate it encountered in the next periods. The following statements were included in the document titled “*To the Ministry of Internal Affairs-Adrianople*” and dated “*12 August 1919*”, sent with the signature of Governor Salim Bey: “*Discrepancies have arisen due to the elections between the Social and Democratic Parties of Bulgaria. Although the parties attempted to hold a public meeting separately, the Karaağaç Government prohibited these attempts*”⁵⁸.

In the light of this information, Salim Bey, the Governor of Adrianople, sent an official letter to the Ministry of Internal Affairs on 12 August 1919 and stated that the Bulgarian Social and Democratic Parties wanted to hold a public meeting in Karaağaç, but the Karaağaç government did not allow this meeting. In terms of our research, there is however more important information in the document. According to the document, there was a discrepancy between the Bulgarian Social and Democratic parties because of the elections held. Thereupon, both groups tried to hold separate public meetings in Karaağaç, but the Karaağaç Government prohibited the gathering of these meetings.⁵⁹

It seems that the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party was formed in 1891⁶⁰ and began to be influential in Bulgarian political life. From the beginning of the 1900s, the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party played an active role in the Bulgarian political culture and organized many important public meetings. It sometimes engaged in banditry⁶¹ and komitadji activities. The Bulgarian Social-Democrat Party, which organized the Bulgarian labor movements and the labor migration abroad, was divided

⁵⁶ Within the framework of the Treaty of Berlin, the Bulgarian National Assembly (Sobranie) approved the Bulgarian constitution on the 23rd of April, 1879, and German Prince Alexander Battenberg was elected as the Bulgarian Prince on the 29th of April, 1879. With the foundation of the Administration of the Principality of Bulgaria, Russian forces left the country. See Köse 2012, p. 217-218.

⁵⁷ Mineva and Raycheva 2001, p. 61.

⁵⁸ BOA. HR.SYS, 2330/46; BOA. DH. ŞFR, 641/74; BOA. DH. ŞFR, 1335.A.12.

⁵⁹ BOA. HR.SYS, 2330/46; BOA. DH. ŞFR, 641/74; BOA. DH. ŞFR, 1335.A.12.

⁶⁰ <https://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/bulgaria.htm> (Accessed on 13.05.2021)

⁶¹ Bojinov 2012, p. 83.

Evaluation of the Political Activities of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party During the Ottoman Period in the Light of New Archival Documents

into two parts as the Social Party and Democrat Party in 1919. Since then, the representative of the Bulgarian social democracy has been these two different political parties. For the Bulgarian social democrats, who have served politically under the roof of a single party within a period of nearly thirty years, two different ways have emerged that should be followed.⁶²

Conclusion

The Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party emerged as a political body in the late 19th century. The concept and content of the social democracy, which was first used in European Workers' Unions and used by European intellectuals overtime to defend the rights of workers who were oppressed in the face of authority, also formed the spiritual basis of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party. With the Industrial Revolution that emerged in the last quarter of the 18th century, the working class was formed in many countries of Europe in different historical processes, especially in England, Belgium, and France. This emerging working class was employed by the owners of the capital, mostly with very low wages. The concept of wild industrialization was made up as a result of this revolution. Employers who wanted to constantly increase their capital had established a system of exploitation of workers. To rebel against this order established by the owners of capital, the workers formed trade union organizations, the first of which was based in England. Despite these organizations, the legal struggle of workers against employers has continued in the process that extends to the present day.

By the end of the 19th century, entering into the process of maturation in terms of its content and sense, the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party emerged to produce policies within the framework of the concept of social democracy and its intellectual universe. The Principality of Bulgaria, founded in 1878 at the time of the emergence of the party, had an autonomous structure but was still subordinate to the Ottoman State. During the period when the party emerged and engaged in political activities, there were political upheavals and social disorders in both Bulgaria and on the Balkan Peninsula. The Ottoman-Russian war of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin after the war deeply affected the political, military, social, and even cultural structure of the Balkans.

The war of 1877-1878 and the signing of the Treaty of Berlin not only affected the newly established Bulgarian principality in many respects but also formed an ideological basis in the process of Bulgaria's independence. From this date until the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy in the Ottoman Empire, the Bulgarians struggled to achieve their full independence. In other words, the Treaty of Berlin was the beginning of the independence process for the Bulgarians.

The Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party emerged in this political and social conjuncture. It came to the forefront as a highly active political structure, especially through labor movements between 1890 and 1908. Various attempts have been made to defend the workers' law through the party. The party pioneered many public meetings,

⁶² BOA. HR.SYS, 2330/46; BOA. DH. ŞFR, 641/74; BOA. DH. ŞFR, 1335.A.12.

prepared statements that provoke the workers, and at times entered into a political quarrel with local governments.

In the documents that we have examined within the scope of this research, new information about the political activities carried out by the party has been obtained. At the beginning of the 20th century, when a dense Bulgarian population flooded to Bulgaria from other Balkan countries Bulgarian workers who tried to survive in extremely difficult economic conditions, immigrated to America to gain better economic opportunities. Initially aiming to achieve economic gains and to return to their country, most of the Bulgarian workers, however, settled in America. These migrations of workers to America were organized by the supporters of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party. Archival documents from the Ottoman period confirm this information precisely and clearly.

Another important result we have reached at the end of the research on the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party is about the extremely effective actions of the party in the political field. According to the information in archival documents, the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party was an active political movement in the Bulgarian Principality at that time. Serious conflicts took place with the local Bulgarian government, especially regarding the protection of workers' rights. The party organized public meetings for the workers to revolt against the authority, carried out propaganda activities, prepared many declarations, and, sometimes by using force, entered into fierce clashes with the government forces. The party also attempted to spread its ideas and to gather supporters in this way. For this reason, the local Bulgarian Government, which saw the party as a danger in terms of its existence, tried to put pressure on it and frequently prosecuted its supporters. Despite all this, the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party pursued its actions. However, the party started to lose its former power during the World War I, and at the end of the war, it was divided into two parts as social and democratic.

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